



DIOCESAN PRESS SERVICE

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

EPISCOPAL CHURCH CENTER • 815 SECOND AVENUE • NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10017

er H. Boyd, Press Officer

Drew Dearnaley, Assistant Press Officer

Telephone: (212) 867-8400

80335

September 25, 1980

'ARMS RACE' FOCUS OF UTAH CONFERENCE

SALT LAKE CITY -- One speaker called it an "enormous, armor-plated dinosaur" and Episcopal Bishop Otis Charles pleaded for action as Utah Christians once again grappled with the conundrum of the MX missile system.

St. Mark's Cathedral here was the site of the second in a series of interreligious conferences on "The Arms Race and the Human Race" in which the Episcopal Diocese of Utah has taken a leading role in forcing the debate over the projected strategic nuclear weapon offensive system to "go public." The convention of the diocese, last spring, supported the bishop in his contention that "the people of Utah have the opportunity to make this crucial strategy decision for the rest of the American people."

That contention was echoed by theologian Harvey Cox of Harvard Divinity School who noted the universal impact of polluting the atmosphere. He pointed to the parallel that the ash from the Mt. St. Helens volcano in the Pacific northwest was coloring the sunsets in Martha's Vineyard, off the Massachusetts coast, and said: "That is why I have come to Utah. This issue is not local; it will have an impact in all the world."

Since a National Council of Churches disarmament conference in Pittsburgh this spring, the American Baptist theologian has been leading a campaign for a unilateral moratorium on the testing, development and deployment of nuclear weapons.

Cox was preceded at the gathering by Dr. Edwin B. Firmage, a professor of law at the University of Utah, who listed four reasons why he opposed the system which would place about 200 warheads and launchers in thousands of acres of the high desert of Utah and Nevada.

Dr. Firmage claimed the system was based on a "perverse strategy" that invited attack in order to preserve other elements of the strategic nuclear system, and added: "I am outraged at such a view of the value of human life." He asserted that the system would "seriously impede if not destroy all hopes of eliminating the arms race which, if unchecked, will surely, some day, lead to nuclear disaster for human kind."

-more-

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024

Calling the proposal "bad military strategy," he said that the "enormous, armored dinosaur would be obsolete before it was fully in place. It is this generation's Maginot Line."

"Finally," the professor continued, "it will destroy so much of the land that I love. No individual receives land to use as he will without restrictions. That is not what private ownership entails. Nor is it the meaning of public ownership of public land." Claiming that we hold the land in trust, he said future generations would certainly blame this one "if we put these God-given resources to such bitter use."

The great, great grandson of Brigham Young, founder of Utah, ended his talk with reference to the play "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead" in which one of the characters says wistfully: "There must have been a time when we could have said 'no'."

That theme was picked up by Cox who referred to a California poll in which 82 percent of those surveyed said that they believed nuclear war was inevitable and that they -- individually -- would not survive it. He said an informal survey he took at Harvard University turned up roughly the same average.

He told the gathering that the "most profound challenge" raised by the proposal was the religious one: "We have in some way misunderstood the clear mandate of the New Testament that our task is to be makers of peace. . .not just supporters of peace, not just prayers for peace."

Pointing to the "just war" theory that, he claimed, had governed Christian conduct since Augustine, he said that "there can be no just nuclear war" and called on the participants to move beyond that to find a new theology.

He cited the call for moratorium as providing a place where Christians could cry out of their despair, and, in crying out be heard and transformed. "I am convinced that if the feeling of numbness and helpless rage can be set aside, if the people in the Church can say 'It is not going to happen. All is not well in Zion, but it is going to be well again,' if we can say that, then a difference can be made."

In his closing remarks, Bishop Charles noted that this was the second such conference held and challenged the people in the Cathedral: "I hope not to come to the third part of this series and still just be talking. It is time for people to start doing something."

#

Editors: An accompanying photograph will be mailed October 2.

DP, DX

